

MD  
Spec  
Repts  
"Ed."

MD  
Y 3.  
Ed 25  
:2/S/  
971

An  
Information Record:  
Background and Experience  
of  
Singer Learning Centers  
for  
Early Childhood Education

Especially Prepared and Presented  
to

The Honorable Marvin Mandel  
Governor  
The State of Maryland

MD.  
Y 3.  
ED 25  
:2/S/  
971

Singer Learning Centers  
for  
Early Childhood Education

Introduction

The Singer Company through its Singer Learning Center Division has moved with determination into the child-care-education field because it believes that it can perform the vital functions demanded by our society. This has now been satisfactorily validated through its four suburban learning centers, industrial day-care center, and ten model cities learning centers. Moreover, Singer Learning Center is developing its four new centers which will be in operation by September, 1972.

Now, it is proposed to provide these early childhood education services to the State of Maryland through its Department of Employment and Social Service, Office of Child Development.

The Singer Company has combined its own corporate experiences with its educational "know-how" to offer its contribution to the establishment of quality child-care-education centers and services. The center tends to offer more than a limited play service; it is a new type pre-kindergarten program for children, ages 3 to 5.

The educational programs of the Singer Learning Centers emphasizes individual instruction and the achievement of learning skills based on the child's capacity. That is, a program of individually guided education based on two major principles.

First, a way of planning specific learning tasks for a child based on his needs and potential and second, selecting and creating the environment most likely to help support and influence the direction of a child's development in his successful attainment of both the educational and social goals that have been established.

The Singer Learning Center seeks to present an educational program equal to the quality of Singer's primary products and hopes through this presentation to contribute to the development of the basic propositions now under consideration in relation to early childhood education within the social concerns of our day.

#### The Background of Singer Learning Centers

The growth of interest in and the recognition of the importance of early childhood education has stimulated many institutions; public, private, and corporate to offer their services in improving as well as initiating innovative special programs in this important area of education. However, the Singer Corporation's Learning Centers for Early Childhood Education represent the first time that a business firm has committed an appropriate share of its corporate resources to a carefully

researched, well-rounded and total child-care-educational program in early childhood education.

Over a period of three years, notable educationalists in the field of early childhood education working in collaboration with the Singer Learning Centers had produced an impressive stock of new ideas and suggestions on education for young children. It was then apparent that the time had come to make these experiences available to young children. The first Singer Learning Center was initiated at Cherry Hill, New Jersey in 1970. The success of this program caused The Singer Company to embark on establishing a nationwide network of centers.

Thus, the Singer Learning Centers for early childhood education came into being. Today, four suburban learning centers in four different states; Cherry Hill, New Jersey; Columbia, Maryland; Port Jefferson, New York; and Worthington, Ohio; an industrial day-care center for fifty employees' children of Ohio Bell and Western Electric; and ten learning centers for five hundred children in Turtle Creek Valley Model Cities are engaged in providing child-care education services. By this September, four new suburban centers and one additional industrial day-care center will be in operation. Shortly thereafter, will come two new urban centers in the City of Indianapolis.

The Singer Learning Centers is an enterprise which has moved from adolescence to maturity. As a pioneer it began with a specific curriculum, tested and proven services for child-care programs, and new concepts of learning, based on a body of new theory and research on how children do and don't learn.

#### The Educational Philosophy

The early years are most important. Educators are discovering that intelligence and achievement is largely determined during the first five years of life. And Singer believes that's what early childhood education is all about.

The Singer program can best be described as the "open education" concept for early childhood education. The open approach is a product of many minds and much research and development. There have been a number of contributors to Singer's new and exciting concept - open education for young children.

The roots of "Open Education," "Informal Education," "Free School" or the "Integrated Day," are embedded in the English Infant Schools along with some American approaches to early childhood education. Charles Silberman in one of the most provocative books of the decade describes the informal school concept in his book, Crisis in the Classroom. He charged that modern schools are oppressive and joyless and that the "informal schooling" or "open education" humanizes them.

Perhaps one of John Dewey's most important contributions to education has been the often used phrase that one learns through his doing, and no one else's. He further emphasized the need for the project method of learning, learning individually and group activities.

Prior to contemporary times, the "free day" school or "informal" school was gradually developing in Great Britain. Today these are known as the English Infant Schools. The English Infant Schools base its learning activities on interests and problems of children. Emphasis is on learning by doing rather than teaching. Instruction is individualized. A plan providing for a high degree of flexibility in the progress of each pupil is in effect. The teacher rarely will be found standing before a class but spending most of the time passing from pupil to pupil directing and assisting the work of the pupils and determining their readiness for progress to the next unit.

The research of Jean Piaget has demonstrated the need for logical thinking at appropriate levels from birth to adolescence. Piaget's research findings report that the greater variety of things a child has coped with, the greater his coping power. Although he has stated that he is not an educator, the application of his theories to education are most appropriate. Surprisingly, Piaget based his major theories on the actions and reactions of his own three children as they were growing up.

J. McVicker Hunt theorized in 1961 that it was possible to raise infant IQ's 30 points by stimulation in very early childhood. The environment which infants encounter can vary an IQ as much as 50 to 70 points. This means that infants with potential from culturally deprived backgrounds may be elevated from the upper levels of mental retardation to do college work someday. Along with this theory the selection of items which can properly be taught to young people and the arrangement of these items in such a way to insure effective learning can be accomplished at an early age.

The emergence of the Singer "open education" concept has culminated from what we now know about child development including the physical, social, and mental aspects of growth. Some educators propose that it reflects an attitude toward teaching. But we must say more, that the attitude emerged from what we know about early childhood education. Open education has perhaps the most promising chance of uplifting the intellectual and cultural level of humanity of our times.

The objectives are:

1. To help the child achieve a positive self image;
2. To encourage the child to express his creativity;
3. To foster a sense of responsibility in respect to the rights of others;
4. To help the child learn to control his behavior;

5. To foster and protect the child's physical health;
6. To create an environment in which children, individually, feel free to participate as an individual, and yet maintain a social give and take relationship with his peers;
7. To encourage communications with his peers and adults in order to improve language skills and sharpen conceptual learning;
8. To encourage the child to listen and concentrate so that the learning process is made effective;
9. To offer a variety of experiences that will satisfy and stimulate the child's innate interest and curiosity in the world in which he lives;
10. To strengthen the role of each parent as a most important mainstay of the child's life; and
11. To increase the parent's acceptance of the child as a growing and developing individual, needing the parent's love and approval.

We begin with the assumption that children want to learn and will learn in their own fashion. We believe that learning is rooted in first hand experiences so that teaching becomes the encouragement of each child's own desire for mastery and understanding. We have respect for and trust in the child's innate capacity and potential to move toward these goals at his own pace. And, we believe flexibility is the lifeline of "open education," and concern for individual differences is the focal point of the program.

In open education the teachers trust children's imagination, respect their feelings, encourage their curiosity, and their natural desire to explore and understand the world about them. In

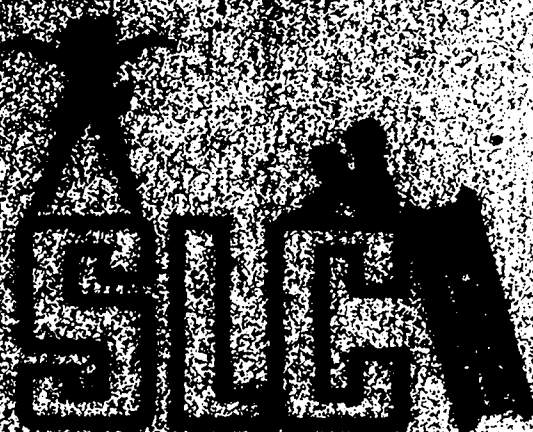


open education, teachers learn to trust themselves to be willing to gamble that they can retain children's interest and that children can and will learn without the use of testing, threats, rules and rituals. A classroom is not rigidly organized and controlled but rather is bustling, flexible, and impulsive. Equally important is that parents must trust that open education and its teachers will do well by their children without the assurance provided by a classroom atmosphere they remember from their own childhood.

For as Charles Silberman in his book Crisis in the Classroom states - "Schools can be humane and still educate well - they can be genuinely concerned with gaiety and joy and individual growth and fulfillment - without sacrificing concern for intellectual discipline and development. They can be simultaneously child centered and subject or knowledge centered. They can stress esthetic and moral education without weakening the three R's. They can do these things if - but only if - their structure, content and objectives are transformed."

Open education is a good way to bring together an active and creative child with an active and creative teacher.

This is the philosophy of the Singer Learning Centers.



**SINGER**

**SEWING MACHINES**



*an EARLY YEARS portfolio*

## BIG BUSINESS' burgeoning interest in early ed

Don't look now, but private enterprise is moving in on your territory. Here . . . there . . . and everywhere business is making inroads into education in general, and preschool and primary education in particular. Some private operators hop-skotch around the country selling education to school systems like the Kentucky Colonel sells chicken—packaged and guaranteed to please. And no doubt some "privateers" have been lured into the field by promise of "gold in them thar hills." But there are also responsible, dedicated corporations investing huge sums in educational plants, props and personnel to help fill the gap between what the public schools can do and what remains to be done. Their work could yield a rich harvest of ideas for your classroom. Presented here, in pictures, is a glimpse at two such operations. And, coming soon: an analysis of what private enterprise's growing interest in early ed means to teachers by United Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker.

*Singer—the same company that made a stitch-in-time sublime for millions of home-makers—is taking a lead in providing preschool and primary education, too. You probably use Singer products in your classroom right now—perhaps SVE materials, Insta-Load projectors or Study Mate film viewers, to name a few. And the Singer Learning Centers for Early Childhood Education—the one shown is at Cherry Hill, N.J.—are testing grounds for new ideas and new products—the best of which will sooner or later find their way into classrooms just like yours.*



At Cherry Hill, the education is open-style; teacher-child relationships, free-style; and the environment, high-style. When Singer V-P Lloyd Kelly first proposed learning centers as a corporate venture, he envisioned them as labs—test tubes for learning how children learn—to benefit schools everywhere. As a result, top education talent was corralled to plan, assess and reassess the programs. In addition to Cherry Hill, Singer now operates centers at Columbia, Md.; Worthington, Ohio; Port Jefferson, N.Y.; and the Turtle Creek area in Pennsylvania. Serving children age 3-8, the centers range from half-day, school-year to full-year, full day-care operations.

"It has to work. Our kind of business accountability requires that it does—that we make whatever adjustments are necessary to accomplish what we know to be a good end. We have to make the theory practical or we're out of business . . ."—Maxwell Jarvis, Singer Learning Centers

Popping up all over California are the Sullivan Pre-School Centers, where, as the fliers to parents say, kids get "fun and learning with tender care."

Inspiration and cornerstone for the preschool centers is the reading program developed by Dr. M. W. Sullivan, noted educator and linguist, which has been used with remarkable results in, for one, the San Francisco schools (see Spring EY, page 38). It is Dr. Sullivan after whom the centers are named and it is he who heads research for the parent company, Behavioral Research Laboratories. The original Sullivan materials have been scaled down to preschooler-size for use in the centers and expanded to include fundamentals of math and the social studies, the arts, dramatic play, science and outdoor education.



an EARLY YEARS portfolio

Basic premise of the Sullivan preschools is that a child's abilities need to be developed according to his own learning style. (A built-in reward system insures success.) Like Singer, Behavioral Research got into preschools with years of practice in providing tools for teachers. And, like Singer, BRL recognizes its stake in, and responsibility for developing and testing innovations that can pay off for children everywhere. ♣

